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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which is based on the philosophy of invitational education, focuses on physical education. It is designed to encourage educators to become aware of the messages they send to students; messages that are general and subtle as well as messages that are direct, specific, and personal. This awareness leads to becoming consistently, intentionally inviting. After an introduction, the booklet focuses on: "The Invitational Education Philosophy" (four assumptions of invitational practice and four categories of invitational practice); "The Role of the Inviting Physical Educator"; "Basic Techniques of Invitational Physical Education" (using the power of an invitation, focusing on individuals, collaborating with colleagues, and exercising honesty, responsibility, and persistence); "Invitational Strategies for Physical Education" (creating an inviting physical environment, using effective people skills, making specialized invitations, working on attitude, and involving others); and "Inventory of Physical Education Invitations." The booklet concludes that the principles and strategies of invitational education can transform physical education into a positive, affirming experience for all students. A list of resources is included. (SM)

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An Invitation to Physical Education

Gary L. Chandler

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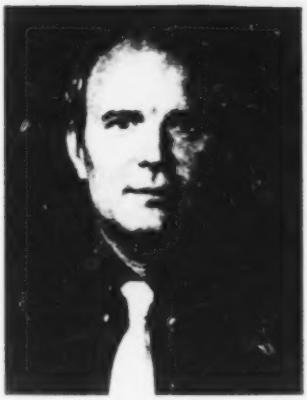

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Chandler dedicates this fastback to his sister, Dr. Josephine Chandler Holcomb, "who invited me to learn."

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

An Invitation to Physical Education

by
Gary L. Chandler

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Table of Contents

Introduction 7

The Invitational Education Philosophy 8

Four Assumptions of Invitational Practice 8

Four Categories of Invitational Function 10

The Role of the Inviting Physical Educator 20

Basic Techniques of Invitational Physical Education 23

Using the Power of an Invitation 23

Focusing on Individuals 24

Collaborating with Colleagues 24

Exercising Honesty, Responsibility, and Persistence 26

Invitational Strategies for Physical Education .. 27

Creating an Inviting Physical Environment 27

Using Effective People Skills 29

Making Specialized Invitations 32

Working on Attitude 35

Involving Others 37

Inventory of Physical Education Invitations 39

Conclusion 42

Resources 45

Introduction

Educators increasingly are recognizing that physical education in its various forms can provide endless opportunities for student success. What has changed in physical education is its philosophy, which now minimizes failure in favor of increasing the possibilities for success for *all* students. Some students may have physical limitations, but these do not diminish their capacity to succeed in some context of physical education.

This fastback is based on the philosophy of invitational education (Purkey 1978). Employing the principles of invitational education means inviting students, teachers, administrators, and parents to participate cooperatively in the educational process. This fastback also is about the people, places, programs, and policies of physical education. All four of these "P's" are necessary to establish and maintain physical education that invites students to succeed.

Physical educators have at their disposal social, emotional, and physical elements that, within the school setting, are unique to the physical education environment. The combination of this quality and the invitational education philosophy is powerful.

7

The Invitational Education Philosophy

Invitational education was developed by William Purkey (1978) and expanded by Purkey and a number of his colleagues. The invitational approach considers messages, or signals, that are communicated within an educational environment. These messages may be "inviting" or "disinviting" and can result in successes or failures in a school. The primary sender of such messages is the teacher. And the messages may be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal. These messages also may be communications to and from students, teachers, parents, administrators, and others within the school.

The philosophy of invitational education offers elements that have nearly universal appeal and can be applied to all areas of life and learning. Physical education is particularly well-suited to the application of invitational education.

Four Assumptions of Invitational Practice

Purkey (1978) established four assumptions that form the cornerstone of invitational education. These assump-

tions are: 1) People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly. 2) Education should be a collaborative, cooperative activity. 3) People possess untapped potential in all areas of human endeavor. And 4) human potential can best be realized by places, policies, and processes that are specifically designed to invite development and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, both personally and professionally. These concepts may seem self-evident, but their application can be complex.

The practical value of invitational education lies in its conceptual simplicity. Certain behaviors — and behavior patterns — portray, or convey, the invitational approach. Others do not. Many of these behaviors are verbal, but body language, attitude, and general demeanor also convey, or fail to convey, the invitation to learning. Thus learning to use inviting behaviors consistently can be a complex challenge.

Put into a physical education context, the question becomes: How can physical educators convey inviting messages to students? The first answer is to focus on recognizing and respecting the student's effort, accomplishment, individuality, and involvement. Such recognition and respect provide an important, achievable starting point. In physical education, students' physical differences, competencies, and deficiencies are quickly noticed, both by the teacher and by other students. Therefore it seems especially important to emphasize positive, inviting behaviors from the very first contact. Verbal and nonverbal recognition, coupled with formal and informal classroom procedures that

validate difference and value the individual, forms a cornerstone of invitational practice in the physical education setting.

A physical education teacher might give verbal recognition by saying to a student, "Your hard work and determination certainly are reflected in your success," or "Once you have mastered this skill, there's no limit to what you can do in this class." A wink or a smile of approval can be affirming and inviting as forms of nonverbal communication. The same can be said of appropriate touches (a pat on the back, a friendly nudge, a "high five") and proximity messages (standing near the student) when they convey approval and acceptance. The latter must necessarily be used with greater consideration to ensure that such touch or proximity is seen as positive, rather than intrusive.

Most formal invitational messages are given within the classroom context. Informal messages can be conveyed in the classroom, but they are conveyed even more readily outside the classroom. In all cases, teachers (and others) must be aware that invitational messages need to be balanced and given fairly. The invitational message that is focused too strongly on a particular student or group of students may have the effect of being disinviting to other students, who may feel left out.

Four Categories of Invitational Function

These general inviting and disinviting behaviors can be ranged along a continuum: 1) intentionally disinviting, 2) unintentionally disinviting, 3) unintentionally

inviting, and 4) intentionally inviting. The goal for educators should be to move from the disinviting end of the continuum toward the inviting end.

Intentionally Disinviting. When words or actions are consciously used by one individual to convey the message that another individual is inferior, worthless, incapable, or irresponsible, then the behavior must be termed "intentionally disinviting." Such behavior can occur in any setting between two or more individuals — manager and secretary, teacher and student, or teacher and class — and the results will be similar.

Often, intentionally disinviting behavior is used by an individual to maintain control or to keep others from encroaching on territory or prerogatives. Some teachers use humiliation to "keep students in line." Others act from prejudice, a low personal self-image that leads to abuse of power and bullying, or simply a lack of faith in others.

The result for an individual on the receiving end of the message is to have been disinvited, even when the intention is supposed to be positive. The message, "You'll *never* be able to do this skill," may be intended as a negative spur to harder effort. In fact, this message is intentionally disinviting, and the likelihood is diminished that the student receiving such a message will be able to do the skill.

Another verbal disinvitation occurs when a teacher openly questions a student's capability or skill in a game or their willingness to participate at a high level of involvement. "Can't you do *anything* right?" or "Is this the best you can do?" are remarks that strike at the heart

of any physical education student, but they can be especially disinviting for lower-skilled students who may indeed be performing the skill as well as they can and giving their very best effort.

Many nonverbal behaviors also are intentional disinvitations. Nonverbal messages may be more subtle and may seem less cutting, but they carry the disinviting message in such a way that students soon recognize it. Some intentionally disinviting nonverbal practices involve body language and movements. When a physical education teacher observes a game and reacts with a shake of the head, a disapproving turning away from the action, or a disgusted look downward, then the message is clear. Students who are looking at their teacher for approval find, instead, a nonverbal communication that is disinviting.

Other intentionally disinviting nonverbal behaviors include using troublesome or unskilled students as "gophers" to keep them busy. An instructor may rationalize that this method is in the best interests of the class as a whole, but such action nonetheless stigmatizes the target student and conveys to the rest of the class that this student is valued less. In many cases, other students mirror the teacher's disinviting behavior by acting in disinviting ways toward the stigmatized student, which compounds the negative message. But such behavior also can put other students on notice that they may be next, which thus extends the disinviting message beyond the target student.

The intentionally disinviting teacher may have personal or professional reasons for engaging in such

behaviors. The teacher may be new and unsure. Or a veteran teacher may be the product of impersonal training or may have a different interpretation of the professional "wall" between teacher and student. None of these is sufficient reason not to recognize the negative effects of intentionally disinviting behaviors on the affective components of the school experience. The teacher's behaviors can limit or enlarge the educational experience for students, depending on the messages they receive from teachers.

A last example of intentionally disinviting behavior occurs when a teacher develops classroom rules that are so overbearing and constraining that students cannot demonstrate their independence and take personal initiative. Teachers who are unable or unwilling to allow personal freedom and initiative in a class develop unreasonable class rules to "keep students in line." While this objective may be attained very well, such constraints also deny students the opportunity to develop decision-making and social skills. As in many such cases, negative expectations often draw negative responses. This type of constrained environment diminishes the likelihood that students will develop a positive attitude toward lifetime physical activities and healthy living behaviors. In contrast, establishing classroom rules that are fair and reasonable sends a message that the teacher is willing to trust students and *expects* trustworthy and responsible behavior in return. Most students will live up to that expectation.

Unintentionally Disinviting. Good intentions often mark unintentionally disinviting behavior. This is be-

havior that separates itself from intentionality because the individual is unaware of the disinvitation that is being tendered. An unintentionally disinviting teacher may simply be unaware that his or her actions are perceived by others as chauvinistic, rude, condescending, patronizing, or insulting.

Often teachers are unintentionally disinviting because they lack effective teaching skills, particularly in the area of interpersonal relations with students. For example, a common problem of physical education teachers is assigning pet names to students. Often these names are assumed to be "cute" and innocuous; but, in fact, they can be unintentionally disinviting. Pet names such as "Tonto" or "Chief" applied to a Native American student or "Stick" or "Bones" to a thin student can call unwelcome attention to the student. Similarly, pet names for students whose real names are long or difficult to pronounce can seem harmless; but their use can be unintentionally disinviting.

Another unintentionally disinviting practice of some physical education teachers is to "throw out the ball" for students eager to play during physical education class. While the teacher may think this gives students a "free day" or "creative social time," in fact it is a disinvitation to learn. It reinforces the stereotype that physical education is merely play and deprives students of being challenged to develop new skills and to apply them. So-called free time is no more appropriate in physical education than in any other classroom. When the practice is overused, it leads to a lowering of respect for the subject by other teachers and administrators,

which, in turn, is unintentionally disinviting in a more generalized sense.

Usually it is obvious in a physical education class which students are highly skilled and which are not. Favoring those students who are more talented may inadvertently disinvite other students. This can be especially true when the skilled students also exhibit high self-esteem and possess good socialization skills. All of this makes the less-skilled student all the more susceptible to unintentional disinvitation. Strongly skilled, socially adept students can dominate a physical education classroom and give the appearance that all is well and that the teacher is highly effective when, in fact, a core of students may be experiencing limited success because their needs are not being met.

Some teachers see the use of highly skilled students as team leaders, for example, as a way of providing less-skilled students with positive role models. However, the overuse of such students — usually good athletes, often males — in these critical roles can be unintentionally disinviting, especially when these choices are viewed as sexist or elitist by less-skilled students. Instead of inviting students to be seen as equals, this practice can be disinviting to females and less-skilled males for whom such a role model conveys the message that "you're not as good as I am." By contrast, the teacher who wants to overcome unintentional disinvitation will choose leaders on the basis of various qualities, including sportsmanship, grades, cooperative attitude, and so on, thereby offering leadership opportunities to many students over time. Using this strategy avoids the ap-

pearance — and unintended fact — of privilege based solely on physical skill.

Unintentionally Inviting. Teachers who are unintentionally disinviting sometimes also are unintentionally inviting. Lack of awareness of behaviors that are inviting or disinviting usually is the cause. A teacher may treat some students and classes as able, valuable, and responsible and yet do the opposite to other classes. Some teachers deal intuitively with certain students, or groups of students, in inviting ways.

Unintentionally inviting behaviors that are responses to individuals and groups of students often can be traced to certain factors, such as the nature of the individual or group. Students who are affable and well-behaved tend to provoke inviting behaviors from their teachers. The composition of the class can be a factor. Some teachers are more positive toward certain ethnic or cultural mixes or toward classes with a particular male-female balance. Unintentionally inviting behaviors may be tendered on the basis of bias, often unrecognized by the teacher. Time of day also can play a role; most teachers and students are more positive in the morning, when the day is fresh, than in the afternoon, when they are getting tired.

In a physical education context, a coach may behave in ways that are unintentionally inviting toward athletes and students who are skilled in physical activities or who are physically fit, just as the same teacher may be unintentionally disinviting toward less-skilled students. Indeed, the act of being unintentionally inviting

toward one group or individual often serves as a disinvitation to others.

Awareness is the key to change. When teachers become aware of the behaviors in which they engage, they can begin to discern which are inviting and which are disinviting and then intentionally employ those behaviors that invite students to learning. This is not to say that teacher behaviors will not vary from individual to individual or from class to class. Rather, teachers will become aware of the nature of their behaviors and be able to alter behaviors to best suit the needs of the individuals and the moment.

Intentionally Inviting. Teachers who are intentionally inviting behave in ways that ensure consistency and avoid problems of misunderstanding. The intentionally inviting teacher constantly checks his or her perceptions. Such self-awareness works to ensure that meaningful, intended messages are sent to students by the teacher's actions.

The most important aspects of intentionality are identifying appropriate behaviors and then acting in congruence with the intent of those behaviors (Chandler and Purkey 1986; Chandler 1988).

The intentionally inviting physical educator is a model of consistency and intent. Inviting behaviors are positive, genuine, consistent, and purposeful. These attributes require a willingness to spend time studying what students need in order to feel invited to learn. What messages convey the invitation? What verbal and nonverbal behaviors are most effective? The answers to

17

these questions vary among individuals and groups of students.

An important aspect of this consideration will be to examine intentionally inviting behaviors in the context of problem situations. What teacher behaviors are needed to counteract negative student attitudes? When a student behaves in an unacceptable manner, how can the problem be corrected in a way that avoids disinvitation? Can the teacher criticize a student's misbehavior but avoid criticizing the student as a person? For example, a teacher might approach a student by saying, "I would like to discuss your behavior in class today," rather than, "You've been a real pain in the neck lately."

Teachers are intentionally inviting when they give verbal messages that affirm positive attitude or effort. "I really liked your attitude in class today" and "I appreciate your effort" are not statements related to performance. Rather, they are intentionally inviting statements that demonstrate a value for the student's positive approach to learning, regardless of skill level attained. This intentionality — to affirm the value of effort and good attitude — works as effectively with less-skilled students as it does with highly skilled students to spur greater effort and participation. It offers an intentional invitation to learning.

However, the same approach also can be applied to performance-related messages. Intentionally inviting messages are especially important for encouraging students who are just beginning to develop the target skills in physical education. Inviting messages can be phrased, for example, as "Your skills are really starting to devel-

op," "You really seem to be getting a grasp of these new rules," or "I see that you're using those skills we worked on in class." For the more-skilled student, observations might include such statements as "I can see your efforts to improve your skills are paying off," "I appreciate your efforts to help other students in class," "Thanks for your help in teaching that skill in class today," or "Your leadership in class really means a lot to me and the class."

Teaching often proceeds from an assessment mentality oriented to finding out what students do poorly or cannot do at all. Too often this approach leads to the sending of disinviting messages. The inviting teacher looks for what students can do and finds ways to focus positive energy toward enlarging each student's repertoire of success.

The inviting physical educator must learn to recognize all levels of student capability and to see students as able, responsible, and valuable. This means going beyond the traditional emphasis purely on performance to recognize other valuable characteristics of physical education success, such as effort, positive attitude, cooperation, and sportsmanship. When physical educators work on these attributes, they often find that improvement comes in other areas as well (Chandler and Purkey 1986). Each student should be given many different opportunities to succeed in the physical education class.

The Role of the Inviting Physical Educator

Most school subjects emphasize headwork and seatwork, most of which occur inside a classroom "box." The physical education "classroom" is different — a gymnasium, a playing field — and so is its emphasis on psychomotor activity. Therefore it may be useful to examine briefly the particular role that must be played by the inviting physical educator.

The instructional setting for physical education is an important factor that shapes the role of the physical educator. This unique environment often allows opportunities for interactions between teacher and student, between teacher and class, and among students, interactions that affect emotional, psychological, and social development as well as physical development.

While physical education is important at the elementary school level, it is at the middle and secondary levels — when the students are adolescents — that this mix of developmental factors is most critical. Inviting and disinviting messages are at their most powerful during these years and can significantly influence whether

a student will succeed or fail in physical education and, in the larger picture, in school. These messages also may affect students' interest in physical activities throughout their lives. Physical education success can be a powerful incentive to succeed in other areas, while failure in physical education can lead to diminished success in other areas.

The role of the physical educator is to create an environment in which the student is respected and treated with dignity by the teacher and other students. It is on this basis that inviting behaviors are built. And if a student displays a disruptive behavior or attitude, it is more inviting to take the student aside, describe the unacceptable behavior, and discuss ways to improve than it

A teacher's willingness to listen to a student's concerns can set the standard for how that student feels about himself and his teacher. Positive interactions contribute to the invitational process.

is to treat the student in ways that lower self-esteem, such as openly rebuking the student during class. This respect for the student's dignity is the cornerstone to further success. While this may seem difficult to do in the heat of the moment, such invitational approaches work; and their positive effects tend to compound and echo through other encounters, both in and out of the classroom.

In fact, perhaps the most important action that the physical educator can take is recognizing students for what they do well and defining that "what" as broadly as possible. Intentionally inviting messages not only recognize physical achievement but also give voice to a value for effort, cooperation, persistence, and other attributes of success not only in school but in the family, the community, and the world of work. "I really liked the way you hustled today," "Your effort is really improving," and "You really helped your team today" are powerful invitations to future achievement.

Basic Techniques of Invitational Physical Education

The concepts of invitational education can be converted from theory into practice using some basic techniques.

Using the Power of an Invitation

Sending inviting messages is like hitting a tennis ball over the net during a match. We can send innumerable invitations to students, and yet they may reject each one. This is their right. We can no more accept the sent invitation for our student than we can dash across the net and return our own serve in tennis. But the potential of the invitation to learning is powerful, and it is well worth our while as teachers to keep batting the ball over the net.

In spite of the fact that our society is becoming increasingly diverse in many ways, many teachers cling to biases of all sorts. Part of the responsibility of teachers is to ensure that the tennis ball of invitation is lobbed to all students, regardless of their appearance, heritage, socioeconomic status, or the like. Schools, to be success-

ful for all students, must be recognized and validated as communities of learners. Teachers have the power to extend or withhold the invitation to learning. Virtually all positive learning experiences in schools result from extending that invitation, which then is accepted by the student. Physical educators need to be aware of their particular position in this exchange, recognizing that their subject is uniquely positioned to capitalize on the potential of inviting students to learn.

Focusing on Individuals

Teachers — not least among them physical educators — are well-positioned to affect the lives and learning of individual students, as well as groups of students. Teachers can go "one on one" with students to issue the invitation to learning by sitting with an individual student at lunch time or at a sports event, by celebrating the student's birthday, and other activities.

The informal nature of the physical education class makes such one-on-one contacts more feasible than in other settings. Computer software can be used to generate personalized cards and notes that are easy for teachers to use to let individual students know that they are recognized and valued. The fact that students may reject such overtures does not diminish the teacher's responsibility to tender individual invitations to learning.

Collaborating with Colleagues

Teachers who put into practice intentional invitation should be drawn to developing collegial relationships

that translate into broad support for students. When a teacher becomes negative in his or her interactions with students, often the reason is personal discouragement or unhappiness. The concepts of invitational education can be called on in collegial interactions to raise a troubled colleague's self-confidence and self-esteem.

As a teacher becomes more self-confident and happier, those feelings are passed on to students. At the same time, that teacher also becomes better able to form strong professional relationships. The result is that the teacher becomes a more effective contributor to the overall effort of invitational education.

Physical education class often is the setting in which both physical and emotional problems surface. The observant physical educator will notice students' concerns and can convey those concerns to other educators through collegial collaboration. In this way, multiple interventions can be used to focus necessary attention on social and emotional matters that may stand in the way of student success.

The same communication channels can serve teachers and students when students are doing well. Success breeds success, and so the invitation to learning can be extended when more teachers and students can validate and celebrate success.

It should be said that teachers also play a role in developing the inviting character of a school by "starting at the top" — that is, by using the same collegial strategies when interacting with school administrators. Principals, deans, assistant administrators, all need to experience the same positive messages that the inviting teacher sends to colleagues and students.

25

Exercising Honesty, Responsibility, and Persistence

To be genuinely inviting demands authenticity. If we do not believe that a student or other individual is capable of performing in a particular manner, then it is actually disinviting to extend an invitation for that student to perform in that manner. In other words, if a teacher cannot be honestly inviting in a given situation, it probably is better to be silent.

The use of invitational strategies also requires educators to invite students to be responsible for their own behavior. One of the main characteristics of invitational education is the teacher's belief that, given the opportunity, all students can act responsibly. By inviting students to take part in designing their own environment and to participate in making their own behavioral rules, it often is possible to avert potential discipline problems. Recognizing that students are capable of responsibility accords dignity.

Finally, it is important for inviting educators to persist in issuing invitations to learning. Not every student will respond the first time an invitation is issued. Rejection is part of the teaching and learning process. And, in fact, rejection may have little to do with the inviter. The right invitation at the right time will make a difference. No invitation is ever wasted, because acceptance may come only gradually.

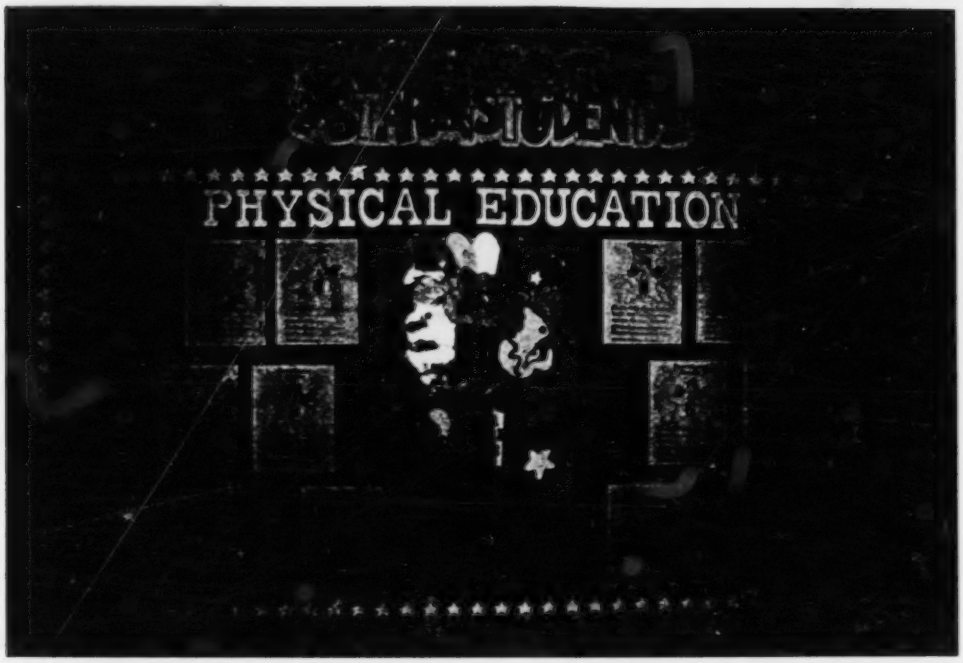
Invitational Strategies for Physical Education

A number of invitational strategies can be developed specifically for physical education settings. Many of the strategies in this section can be elaborated in various ways to strengthen the invitational message. I have grouped the strategies under several topic headings.

Creating an Inviting Physical Environment

A Welcoming Space. Gymnasiums are not often thought of as inherently inviting places. Whether the facility is old or new, its invitational qualities can be enhanced by keeping it clean, neat, and bright. This should be true not only of the gym proper but also of the ancillary rooms, such as offices and locker rooms. Keeping these spaces free of debris and clutter, from old coffee cups and soda cans to soiled towels, is a step in the right direction. Equipment should be properly stored. Students should be taught how to maintain the physical education setting, and then they will take pride in doing so.

Positive Signs. The use of colorful displays and bulletin boards also can enhance the physical environment. School mottoes and emblems should be displayed. They



Recognition is a powerful message of invitation. This elementary school bulletin board display recognizes students who have demonstrated positive attributes in physical education, such as cooperation and sportsmanship.

are not only attractive but also display school spirit. Inviting signs, such as "Please Help Us Respect Kings Mountain Middle School," put the invitational message into words. And pride can be reinforced by a sign that emphasizes the environmental invitational message, such as "Our Pride Is Reflected in Our Cleanliness," which also reminds students to pick up after themselves.

Informality. Classes that are "all business" can be disinviting. Inviting teachers let students know that school, like life, is more than just work. While study and practice are vital to learning, a few moments of personal sharing can be an inviting way to begin or end a class. This informal approach matches with action the invit-

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ing physical setting that a teacher creates for and with students.

Using Effective People Skills

Basic Recognition. All students are human and deserve respect. While few students may become highly skilled athletes, all can improve their physical skills. The educators' role is to invite them to do so. Such basic recognition must extend to acknowledging students' human qualities and frailties. A note of support can be a welcome contact for the student who seems to be having a personal problem. A quiet chat to let the troubled student know that the teacher is "there for them" and supportive extends the natural character of invitational education.

Name Recognition. The companion of basic recognition is specific recognition — in other words, knowing students' names. Teachers must learn students' names as soon as possible. The wise inviting teacher also addresses students by the name they prefer, whether that's a given name or a nickname. The teacher who shortens "Eduardo" to "Eddie" may be unknowingly disinviting that student.

Newcomers. First impressions are important to conveying the invitation to learning and to setting a positive tone for the time to come. A key part of that invitation is getting to know the new student's interests, where he or she comes from, and so on, and perhaps inviting the newcomer to share this information with the class. New students also may benefit from having a mentor assigned to them during the first few days or weeks. The

peer mentor can help the student "learn the ropes" and get past the initial awkwardness of being new.

Greetings and Farewells. The physical educator's ready smile and warm greeting can issue a first invitation to learning. Teachers who are on time, fully prepared, and armed with a positive attitude communicate a value for success that speaks louder than any words. Positive farewells are the counterpart of welcoming greetings.

Explicit Invitations. Sometimes vague or general invitations to learning can be open to misinterpretation. Some teachers are more adept than others at sending subtle or nonverbal invitations, and some students are better "readers" of subtlety. Explicit invitations overcome potential misinterpretation by being unmistakable. They combine a verbal message with other positive communication, such as moving closer to the individual or flashing an approving smile.

Absences. When students miss school, they need to know that they were missed. A phone call or note of concern can be a helpful inviting strategy. A get-well card signed by all their classmates can be used for longer absences. Another way to handle longer absences is to develop a peer network, so that students help their absent classmate stay in touch with school events.

Telephone Contacts. Phone calls home often carry the same connotation as telegrams: Bad news is coming. An inviting strategy is to make positive calls to both students and their parents. The inviting teachers will discover that a phone call of praise or congratulation can be very refreshing. Students who receive such calls benefit from positive attention, and their self-esteem rises.

Parents who receive such calls about their children will carry over the positive message from the school to the home environment. It is not difficult for a teacher to set aside time for two or three calls each evening, and the invitational benefits can be many.

Positive Rumors. The inviting teacher can note something positive that one student does and tell others, usually without using the student's name. Positive rumors validate good effort and accomplishment in a way that generalizes the effect. Yet the student in question, who remains anonymous, can recognize his or her role and feel good about it. This strategy is indirectly inviting but nonetheless powerful.

Intangible Recognition. An inviting strategy somewhat related to positive rumors is the giving of intangible recognition. Such recognition is general but positive. For example, the inviting teacher might simply say to a student, "Nice try," or "You really helped your team today," or "You're a team player." This short, simple form of recognition can go a long way toward boosting students' self-esteem, both individually and collectively. Individually, it provides nonspecific but direct recognition; collectively, it sets a positive tone that will ripple through a class.

Opportunities for Success. The inviting physical educator understands that every student needs many opportunities for success and that each student should have at least some opportunity to succeed every class period. Some students are not going to thrive on the physical aspects of physical education, but physical education also includes other aspects — social, intellectual — that can

offer success. Some success opportunities can be very simple: leading exercises, demonstrating a skill, taking roll, assisting in distribution and collection of equipment. Some element of every class can be used for each student to find success that validates the invitation to learning.

Shared Duties. Managing a physical education class involves many small, time-consuming tasks that students can and, often, are eager to do for the teacher. Students may be designated weekly or monthly as assistants to help take roll, distribute and collect equipment, monitor and clean the locker room, gym, and so on. Assistants may be selected on the basis of cooperation, responsibility, effort, attitude, and enthusiasm. The inviting teacher makes certain that all students have an equal opportunity to assume these duties at some point during the year.

Making Specialized Invitations

Special People/Special Times. All students take physical education, especially in elementary and middle school, and so there are many opportunities to invite students in special ways. Teachers can keep a list of students' birthdays, for example, and make it a point to express good wishes on the appropriate day. Blank cards are handy for pasting in a clipping for the student whose name is mentioned in a newspaper article or whose picture appears in the local paper.

Class Spirit. Physical educators can encourage class participation right from the start by inviting each class

to decide on a class name, emblem, motto, or color. This stratagem helps invest student involvement in the class and can provide a positive springboard for the year. A class motto or name also forms a type of commitment or bond that can be referred to during the course of the year as a reminder of goals that were set at the start.

Music. Many commercial gyms use music to set an exercise tempo, and schools also can use this strategy to enliven warm-up exercises and add rhythm to other activities. Children and adolescents alike tune in to music and can make useful suggestions about the songs or styles to play. Teachers, too, will find that music adds a welcome dimension to physical education.

Talent Exhibits. When students have opportunities to show their skills to others, the activity can be inviting in itself. Special presentations to the PTA or a school assembly offer opportunities for students to feel good about themselves, their progress, and their accomplishments. Exhibiting skills in tumbling, square dancing, aerobic dancing, or shooting free throws lets peers, family members, neighbors, and friends cheer on students.

Talent exhibits, particularly in the areas I just noted — areas outside the "mainstream" physical activities of basketball, football, and the like — allow students who may otherwise be timid in physical education to "show off" and raise their self-esteem. These activities offer opportunities for new student leaders to emerge. And talent exhibits also can serve to bring unity to classes, including some that previously may have been seen as problem classes.

Reading. Reading a short inspirational story at the beginning of class can be an inviting strategy. We often see

today's sports stories, but physical education can draw on a rich history of athletic figures who exemplify values that educators would like for their students to emulate. Taking time to explore the sports pages of the local newspaper or a current sports magazine also can remind students that physical activities are newsworthy and provide another context for physical education.

Incidentally, a good classroom library can be an asset for physical education as readily as for other subjects. Particularly in the areas of health and fitness, reading materials that are geared to the students' abilities and interests can add measurably to the invitation to learning.

Sports History. Researching sports histories and then writing reports or drawing posters are ways to add depth to physical education. Students (and other educators) often seem to forget that physical education has an academic side. Knowing about athletic traditions and changes over time can evoke interest in some physical activities that previously were not considered interesting.

An offshoot of this strategy is taking on new or foreign physical activities. Students can combine interests in foreign cultures with physical education, for example, by learning about activities in which other nations engage. Short units on bocce, cricket, or t'ai chi can extend the invitation to physical education learning.

Audiovisuals. Like reading sports stories and articles about physical activities, occasionally it can be appropriate to incorporate audiovisual materials as an inviting strategy. Film highlights of famous sporting events, such as the World Series, the Super Bowl, the Olympics, World Cup Soccer, Wimbledon tennis, or the Masters golf tour-

nament, can enliven and inspire. Watching such events also can be starting points for research and writing.

Noncompetitive Events. Departing from traditional competitive activities can be an inviting strategy. Some physical activities should emphasize cooperation over competition and dispense with "winners" and "losers." This strategy can be particularly effective when a teacher wants to help students work on skill improvement, teamwork, and helping others.

Working on Attitude

Student Decisions. When students have an opportunity to have input into what a class does and how it goes about learning, then they are more likely to feel personally invested in successful learning. Inviting students to share in making important decisions encourages students to take greater interest in what they are learning and how that knowledge can be used. It also teaches leadership skills, such as how to build consensus and how to cooperate with others. Inviting physical educators will find that involving students in this way not only improves the cohesiveness of a class but also offers skills and positive attitudes that students take with them to other classes and activities.

Verbal Positives. Negativism is almost invariably disinviting. The inviting educator finds ways to rethink and rephrase the negative message. For example, instead of saying, "No, that's not how to dribble a basketball," the physical educator might say, "Let me show you again that dribbling technique I introduced." The object of a

verbal positive is to avoid embarrassing the student (which would be a disinvitation) and to open a new opportunity to teach or communicate.

Unconditional Messages. Sometimes teachers unwittingly send messages that suggest that they really do not mean them. These include such messages as "You can win *if* you are willing to pay the price," or "We'll put you on the team, *but* you'll have to work hard." Such conditional messages are disinviting. Simple declarative statements of support, such as "I think you can do it" or "You're a member of this team," are unconditional and more inviting.

Being "With It." Inviting teachers at least visit their students' world now and then. Making the effort to stay up on teen fashions and fads, popular heroes, and the latest movies and music is worthwhile when it allows teachers to understand what is on their students' minds — and absorbing their attention. Teachers who are "with it" better identify with their students, and the identification can be instrumental in inviting students to learning.

It can be especially helpful to find out who are the students' heroes, particularly in the realm of sports. These individuals may be the superstars, such as Michael Jordan or Cal Ripken Jr., but they might just as readily be the local "stars" at a nearby college or in the school. Heroes offer images for positive identification. Encouraging such identification can be another inviting strategy.

Advertised Success. Savvy inviting teachers take time to let others know about students' success. They recognize students by using the school newspaper, bulletin boards, and award ceremonies. They also talk about

what (and how well) students are doing when they make presentations to the PTA or the school board and among their colleagues, whether in the faculty lounge or a faculty meeting. Students who are publicly praised — either generally or specifically — gain confidence. Such recognition can turn around negative attitudes and stimulate performance and effort.

Involving Others

Educator Participation. Superintendents, principals, other supervisors, and school board members should occasionally be invited to participate in the physical education class. Students will benefit from seeing the interest and commitment of others in the education enterprise. This includes retirees and community members from other education-oriented agencies and institutions. Involving the school principal now and then can be a particularly inviting strategy, because it allows students to see the school's chief administrator in a new light.

Parent Involvement. Just having parents in the classroom from time to time demonstrates the "reach" of the school. It says to students that education is important not just in the classroom but in the world beyond the school as well. Inviting parents to participate in educational activities also helps to sharpen teachers' skills as they demonstrate techniques, talk about information, and "sell" their physical education program.

Special Populations. Often it is informative to let students see how their peers with special needs tackle physical education. All students need an understanding of the

Special needs students can be empowered by the invitational process to participate in physical education to the best of their ability. Other students who share the challenges of special needs students also experience anew the invitation to learning.

struggles some individuals face. Often, special needs students are isolated, even now as inclusion becomes more commonplace. Taking time to acquaint all students with the challenges of special needs can help students become more knowledgeable and sensitive to their peers.

Guidance Knowledge. Inviting educators need to know as much about their students as possible. Staying in touch with the school's guidance counselor can provide a vital link to important information about students' needs, desires, and, in some cases, limitations and challenges. It is not necessary, or advisable, to wait for problems to arise before having an "off the record" conversation with a counselor about a particular student.

Inventory of Physical Education Invitations*

The inventory on pages 40 and 41 can be used as a tool with middle, junior high, and high school students in order for the physical educator to obtain firsthand feedback about the inviting (or disinviting) character of his or her classes (Chandler 1988). Very little mental adaptation of the phrasing is necessary for the same inventory to be used as a self-assessment by the physical educator.

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39

Inventory of Physical Education Invitations

Circle the number that answers the question for you.

	Yes		Sometimes			No
1. Are you treated courteously by your physical education teacher?	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Does your physical education teacher know your name?	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Does your physical education teacher help students in class get to know one another?	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Does your physical education teacher try to recognize special events like birthdays?	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Does your physical education teacher *personally* invite you to participate in class activities?	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Are the gym and physical education teacher's office attractive?	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Do you feel welcomed when you come into your physical education class?	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Is it easy to visit your physical education teacher when you need to?	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Does the physical education teacher follow through on things he or she promises to do?	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. When you have problems, does your physical education teacher express concern and care?	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Is your teacher courteous to everyone in class?	5	4	3	2	1	0

12. Is your physical education teacher on time for classes and appointments?	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Does your physical education teacher seem to *really* listen to you?	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Are you invited to give suggestions to your teacher about the physical education program?	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Do you feel free to communicate your concerns to your physical education teacher?	5	4	3	2	1	0
16. Do you feel free to make an appointment with your physical education teacher?	5	4	3	2	1	0
17. Does your physical education teacher give students a voice in the way things go in class?	5	4	3	2	1	0
18. Is your teacher fair in the enforcement of rules and policies?	5	4	3	2	1	0
19. Is the physical education office usually open?	5	4	3	2	1	0
20. Do the activities provided in physical education class help you in any way in your personal life?	5	4	3	2	1	0
21. Does the school newspaper carry information about your physical education program?	5	4	3	2	1	0
22. Are the bulletin boards and displays in the gym up to date?	5	4	3	2	1	0
23. Does your physical education teacher make positive remarks about you?	5	4	3	2	1	0
24. Does your physical education teacher try to make new students feel at home?	5	4	3	2	1	0
25. Does your physical education teacher *care* about you?	5	4	3	2	1	0

41

41

Conclusion

Inviting behaviors do not necessarily come naturally, and sometimes they do not come easily. In fact, the ways that educators approach students often are conditioned by habits learned in their own upbringing, schooling, and teacher training. Some teachers are intentionally disinviting, usually because they fail to understand that negative messages seldom are as powerful as positive ones. Many teachers lack intent, simply responding from habit or intuition. Thus they may be unintentionally disinviting or unintentionally inviting, depending on the moment or the situation.

The purpose of this fastback is to encourage educators to become aware of the messages they send to students, messages that are general and subtle (such as structuring the learning environment in certain ways) as well as messages that are direct, specific, and personal. This awareness leads to becoming consistently, intentionally inviting and will have the best results.

I have heard critics refer to invitational education as "contrived." I would counter that structuring one's teaching messages to be intentionally inviting is no more contrived than applying the formal and informal

rules of conduct by which most humans live. Teachers who conduct themselves in ways that invite students to learning act out of regard for human dignity, respect for individual thought and behavior, and an understanding that learning is most effectively stimulated by positive, rather than negative, messages. The principles of inviting behavior are as effective outside the learning environment as they are in schools and classrooms.

The major advantage of invitational education is its focus on positives. Inviting educators demonstrate a value for students and individual learning that transcends subject matter. Indeed, this fastback might have been written for teachers in any discipline with only a few changes in wording. The philosophy of invitational education is purposefully universal.

The power of invitations is compounded through persistence. Some teachers become frustrated when their invitations are ignored or rejected. Rejection often is bred of unfamiliarity when those on the receiving end are more accustomed to negative messages and commands. But no invitation can be accepted unless it is sent, and so inviting teachers must understand that they must continue to send invitations to learning. Eventually acceptance will come — and success in learning will follow.

Invitational education is designed to enhance students' self-esteem. Most students take physical education at various times throughout their schooling. Many, particularly if they are not inclined toward athletics or physical activity, find the classes to be negative experiences. Invitational education is particularly appropriate

for these students. The principles and strategies of invitational education can transform physical education into a positive, affirming experience for all students. In turn, this transformation will have a positive ripple effect throughout the entire school environment and, indeed, to the community beyond.

44

Resources

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